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Adequate knowledge and bodily complexity in Spinoza's account of consciousness*

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Qui si smarrisce la vista
e nel suo andare alla mente
si corrompe e tramonta.
Come se traversando
pagasse ad ogni passo
il pedaggio del corpo.

V. Magrelli, *Ora serrata retinae*

Abstract

This paper aims to discuss Spinoza's theory of consciousness by arguing that consciousness is the expression of bodily complexity in terms of adequate knowledge. Firstly, I present the link that Spinoza built up in the second part of the *Ethics* between the ability of the mind to know itself and the *idea ideae* theory. Secondly, I present in what sense consciousness turns out to be the result of an adequate knowledge emerging from the epistemological resources of a body as complex as the human one. Thirdly, I address a possible objection that might arise in considering our daily-life experience of consciousness. I conclude that understanding consciousness in terms of adequate knowledge is coherent with both our phenomenological experience and Spinoza's texts. Such an interpretation permits to underline the overthrow of Descartes' account of consciousness by Spinoza.

Keywords: Spinoza, consciousness, bodily complexity, common notions, idea of an idea, adequate knowledge.

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Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es examinar la teoría de la consciencia de Spinoza a fin de sostener que dicho concepto debe ser comprendido como expresión de la complejidad corpórea en términos de conocimiento adecuado. En primer lugar, presentaré la conexión que Spinoza establece entre la habilidad de la mente para conocerse a sí misma y la teoría de la *idea ideae* en la primera parte de la *Ethica*. En segundo lugar, se explicará en qué sentido la conciencia resulta ser el resultado de un conocimiento adecuado que emerge de los recursos epistémicos de un cuerpo tan complejo como el humano. En tercer lugar, me hago cargo de una posible objeción que podría surgir a partir de la consideración de nuestra experiencia cotidiana de la conciencia. Finalmente concluyo que entender la conciencia en términos de conocimiento adecuado es coherente tanto con nuestra experiencia fenomenal, como con los textos de Spinoza. Dicha interpretación permite, además, destacar la refutación de Spinoza de la teoría de la conciencia de Descartes.

Palabras clave: Spinoza, conciencia, complejidad corporal, nociones comunes, idea de una idea, conocimiento adecuado.

1. Minimizing consciousness: Spinoza against Descartes

The important role that consciousness plays in Descartes' theory of mind is well known: consciousness is the main aspect –maybe the essence– of the human thought, and it refers only to the *res cogitans,* without any relationship with the *res extensa*. However, Spinoza's rejection of this argument and his skeptical view towards Descartes' explication of the *union between the human mind and body* are equally well known. The *Preface* of the fifth part of the *Ethics* shows clearly that Spinoza is mainly concerned with the mind–body problem. In order to propose a feasible solution to this problem, he develops a very different account of the human mind, which he defines as an *idea corporis*. Because Spinoza no longer needs consciousness in order to characterize human thought, consciousness seems to lose epistemological interest for him[1].

[1] Consciousness is not a much-discussed theme in Spinoza's literature. Messeri (1990) has justified this status *quaestionis* by arguing that Spinoza conceives of thought as not linked with intentionality, and so, the concept of consciousness becomes useless. However, Messeri's statement goes beyond a merely explanatory scope: it is possible to account for consciousness without conceiving con-

Less obvious is the fact that although consciousness does not constitute a major theme in Spinoza's epistemology, he presents a rather sophisticated account of it. This account is not strictly necessary to characterize the human thought: the act of thinking is what we consider as an *attribute of God*, and consciousness, if there is any, might be only a *property*[2] of thought. However, we can infer from what Spinoza says about consciousness that he is not only very far from Descartes but that he reconnects consciousness and bodily complexity.

In this paper, I would like to argue that, according to Spinoza, the human mind and its consciousness are *embodied*. Such an interpretation is not obvious at all. My general thesis is the following: If we do not consider bodily complexity then we are unable to understand the real ground of Spinoza's theory of mind. And if we do not consider adequate knowledge, we are not able to understand why our mind is never totally conscious or is conscious to the same degree of whatever happens to its body[3]. For this reason, I think that in order to understand Spinoza's account of consciousness we have to consider together adequate knowledge and bodily complexity[4].

I start (§2) from E2P20-23[5]. There Spinoza introduces consciousness in relationship with two doctrines: the theory of *affections* that

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sciousness itself as marked by intentionality. Therefore, an objective account of consciousness is aimed to conceive of it as something somewhat necessary and, to some extent, mechanical, or, in Spinoza's words, as an *automa spirituale*. As regards this point, Balibar (1994) and Malinowski-Charles 2004 hold the same views. For a further discussion, cf. Mascarenhas (1998) and Nadler (2008).

2 That is, something that follows from the essence of thinking but does not constitute this essence. Cf. KV1, 3.

3 I agree with the general account of consciousness presented by Nadler (2008) and I discuss it in §3. But Nadler does not consider adequate knowledge as relevant in this account. However, if consciousness relates only with bodily complexity, since bodily complexity cannot significantly increase or decrease during our lifetime, then our mind cannot increase or decrease its consciousness, but we are evidently not always conscious or conscious to the same degree of the same things, and, as Nadler points out, consciousness is something that has to be understood in terms of degrees.

4 Cf. Sangiacomo (2010b) and Scribano (2012).

5 I quote from Spinoza 1984. I employ the standard system of abbreviations used for Spinoza's works, i.e., E = *Ethics*, TIE = *Treatise on the emendation of intellect*, KV = *Short Treatise,* Ep = *Letter*, P = proposition, S = scholium. Numbers indicate each part of the work quoted: the proposition or the paragraph.

explains the way by which the mind can know itself, and the theory of *idea ideae*, through which –as I shall argue– we have to understand Spinoza's account of knowledge in terms of its *adequacy*. In this account, this pivotal point elucidates the role of the human body. As I attempt to demonstrate (§3), Spinoza distinguishes two main *ways of knowledge*: the *common order of nature* and the *order of intellect*. Bodily complexity is the common source of both, but only the second provides us consciousness, thanks to our *common notions*. In order to better understand this point I conclude by answering (§4) a possible objection that might arise, arguing how this account of consciousness is coherent with what Spinoza says in E3 and E5 on the same topic.

2. Consciousness as adequate knowledge

I would like to start by analyzing the following proposition:

> P23: *The Mind does not knows itself, except insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the Body.*
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> Dem: The idea, *or* knowledge, of the Mind (by P20) follows in God in the same way, and is related to God in the same way as the idea, *or* knowledge, of the body. But since (by P19) the human Mind does not know the human Body itself, i. e. (by P11C), since the knowledge of the human Body is not related to God insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human Mind, the knowledge of the Mind is also not related to God insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human Mind. And so (again by P11C) to that extent the human Mind does not know itself. Next, the ideas of the affections by which the Body is affected involve the nature of the human Body itself (by P16), i. e. (by P13), agree with the nature of the Mind. So knowledge of these ideas will necessarily involve knowledge of the Mind. But (by P22) knowledge of these ideas is the human Mind itself. Therefore, the human Mind, to that extent only, knows itself, q. e. d. (E2P23 with Dem)[6]

The expression «*mens se ipsam cognoscit*» could reasonably be translated also as, *the mind is conscious* or *the mind has consciousness of itself*. However, it is very important to make a preliminarily clarification about the way in which we interpret «consciousness». I suggest that in a Spinozean context, we are not allowed to interpret

[6] All of Spinoza's quotations are taken from Spinoza (1984).

consciousness as *apperception*, that is, as an overall state of mind[7]. Indeed, according to Spinoza, we have to consider all of what happens in our mind in concrete and particular terms, without making use of any *faculty*. Spinoza states, in the most explicit way, that *intellect* and *will* are not distinct from each other, they are just the collection of all the particular ideas that our mind has[8].

In accordance with this nominalistic claim, also consciousness should be considered as nothing but the set of our conscious states, that is, our conscious ideas: we are more or less conscious insofar as we have a greater or a fewer number of conscious ideas. In sum, from a Spinozean standpoint, my self-consciousness is nothing but the fact that I am conscious of some different things by having some different conscious ideas of them.

Again, I can be conscious of myself only because (and only through) my being conscious of x, y and z. Indeed, in Spinoza's view, we have to do with singular and particular *states of consciousness* and not with a general *self-consciousness*, since the latter is nothing but a generalized result of the former. For this reason, when in the following discussion I deal with a «conscious mind», I mean nothing but «a mind which has several conscious ideas».

This remark should allow the following translation for E2P23: *the Mind does not have an idea of itself, except insofar as it has an idea of the affections of the Body.* However, in Spinoza's view, the mind is nothing but the *idea of our body* that is given in God's thought. Then, P23 can also be interpreted as, *an idea of the idea of our body that can exist in God if and only if this idea entails an idea of the affection of its body.* An idea of an affection of our body is the condition for having an idea of the mind. This means that an idea of an affection is the condition for having consciousness. This is the link between the *idea ideae* theory –presented just before E2P23– and

[7] Baker (2000) develops her first-person theory taking issue with Cartesian dualism. Surprisingly, however, she never mentions Spinoza. In any case, Spinoza's anti-Cartesianism results also in this refusal to consider consciousness as a faculty, and therefore a first-person perspective as something essential to the human mind. For a general presentation of Spinoza's epistemology and rationalism, and for the different ways in which Spinoza uses the term «mens», cf. Parkinson (1954) and (1983).

[8] Cf. E2P48-49. See also KV2, 16.

affections. But we cannot understand the real meaning of this link without taking the reference that Spinoza makes to God's thought very seriously.

Indeed, Spinoza states that the mind's idea can follow *in God*. However, arguing that a certain idea follows *in* God means that this idea must be *adequate*. Thus, this statement means that the human mind can know itself *adequately* only by means of the idea of its bodily affections. That is to say, the human mind is *conscious* only through an *adequate* idea of its affections.

This point could be better understood by focusing on the central thesis of Spinoza's theory of knowledge that is the ground for the main part of the demonstration of P23 as quoted above[9]:

> the human Mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God. Therefore, when we say that the human Mind perceives this or that, we are saying nothing but that God, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is explained through the nature of the human Mind, *or* insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human Mind, has this or that idea; and when we say that God has this or that idea, not only insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human Mind, but insofar as he also has the idea of another thing together with the human Mind, then we say that the human Mind perceives the thing only partially, *or* inadequately. (E2P11C)

The mind *is* God's thought of a certain thing[10]. God's thought is adequate by definition, and therefore the essence of the human mind *is* to have adequate knowledge. Inadequate ideas do not depend solely on the human mind: I can have inadequate ideas since I cannot envisage a certain thing in its completeness, or, more properly, since God can conceive this thing only by means of my mind *with* something else. Inadequate knowledge is not something real, but merely the *privatio* that I can ascribe to my mind when it conceives of something that exceeds my idea of such thing[11].

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9 For a further discussion of this point, cf. Lucash (1984).

10 Harris (1978) stresses this point and its significance. Wilson (1999a) agrees also with it. For the opposite perspective, cf. Renz (2009) and (2011).

11 Cf. E2P33-36. Please note that I prefer use the verb «to conceive» when I refer to God's act of thinking, while I prefer «to conceive of» insofar as the human mind is concerned, because the human mind does not produce ideas, but more properly pays attention to and incorporates those of God's ideas that exist eternally (according to E2P8).

Since human body entails a relationship with external bodies, the human mind cannot perceive nor have an adequate knowledge of its body –its *ideatum*– without an adequate knowledge of its affections (E2P19). More properly, God can have an idea of the human body only by having an idea of the human body *and* its affections. But from God's standpoint *to have an idea* is identical with *to have an adequate idea*. However, the ideas of our affections are not necessarily adequate (E2P24-29), and therefore having an idea of our affections is a *necessary but not sufficient* condition to have consciousness – since consciousness (that means *idea ideae* given in God) entails adequate knowledge, but our ideas of affections do not.

If I have an *in*adequate idea of an affection, God cannot conceive it by means of my mind; therefore, what constitutes the adequate idea of my mind and its affection *in God* is, in this case, something different from what constitutes my mind when it perceives inadequately this affection. Therefore, insofar as (*quatenus*) my mind perceives inadequately its affections, it is not identical to the adequate idea of my body that is present in God's thought, and, therefore, it is not identical to the idea of this idea either. Due to this reason, insofar as (*quatenus*) my mind has inadequate ideas of the affections of its body it is in this respect not conscious of itself. In this case, indeed, something happens to its body, but the mind is unable to detect exactly what happens: the mind has no idea of this, i.e., it is not conscious of that affection. Being conscious, thus, entails not only having an idea of certain affections, but also having an idea of them, which is *adequate* [12].

The *idea ideae* theory Spinoza develops in P20-22 is devoted to ground the meaning of P23[13] in a stronger way. But this theory

[12] This argument shifts between the mind as an idea of our body, and God's idea of it, and, subsequently, it may turn out to be unclear. However, I agree with Zourabichvili (2002) who claims that this shift is effectively necessary to understand Spinoza's account of the mind. In any case, this remark does not exclude that ideas can have some degree of consciousness without being fully conscious –in the same way in which ideas can have some degree of adequacy without being fully adequate.

[13] Martin (2007) provides a more sophisticated account of the *idea ideae* theory of consciousness by arguing that (p. 279) «the idea of the mind is an idea of an idea, and this is the mind's self-awareness. So not only is the mind aware of its affections in virtue of those affections being aware of themselves, but so is the mind itself self-aware since there is also for it an idea – the

implies on its own that an *idea of idea* should be adequate. Hence, if consciousness is a kind of *idea ideae*, then consciousness should also entail adequate knowledge. Therefore, what we read in E5P30-31S about the implication between adequate knowledge and consciousness is a reciprocal one: adequate knowledge can imply consciousness *because consciousness implies adequate knowledge*.

I also suggest that the *idea ideae* theory Spinoza presents in the *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*, accounts for this interpretation. Indeed, in this early work[14], Spinoza argues that:

> a true idea (for we have a true idea) is something different from its object. [...] And since it is something different from its object, it will also be something intelligible through itself; that is, the idea, as far as its formal essence is concerned, can be the object of another objective essence, and this other objective essence in turn will also be, considered in itself, something real and intelligible, and so on, indefinitely. [...] From this it is clear that certainty is nothing but the objective essence itself, i. e., the mode by which we are aware of the formal essence is certainty itself. And from this, again, it is clear that, for the certainty of the truth, no other sign is needed than having a true idea. For as we have shown, in order for me to know, it is not necessary to know that I know. From which, once more, it is clear that one can know what the highest certainty is unless he has an adequate idea or objective essence of some thing. For certainty and an objective essence are the same thing. (TIE §§33-35)

If I have an adequate idea of an idea, I am certain of that idea: certainty is nothing but my *awareness* about the fact that a given idea is true –i. e.,

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idea of the mind». To explain the difference between being conscious and non-conscious, thus, Martin develops the concept of complexity (p. 282): «the quality that distinguishes the human mind from others is its being more complex, and it is from this that its ability to perceive its own mental states, that is, its ability to be self-aware, follows. Complexity, then, is the factor that distinguishes the more real or excellent individuals from the less. Conscious minds are therefore distinguished from non-conscious minds on account of their being more complex». However, due to the parallelism held in E2P7, the mind's complexity results only from bodily complexity, and this is for this reason that also the idea ideae account of consciousness should consider bodily complexity as its proper ground.

[14] Regarding the chronology of Spinoza's early works, cf. Mignini (1986). About the meaning of TIE among Spinoza's works, cf. Sangiacomo (2010a).

adequate. The idea of an idea should be adequate in order to be certain: therefore, in order to be aware of a given idea, the idea of this idea has to be adequate. I suggest that *to be aware* of a given idea is not different in any relevant way from *to be conscious* of that idea. Therefore, our consciousness (or the adequate idea) of a given idea has to be adequate too.

From the *Intellectus Emendatione* to the *Ethics*, Spinoza keeps claiming that to have an *idea vera* implies the certainty of this idea, that is to say, that from *knowing that p* it necessarily follows that I am *certain* that *p*. Thus, the *idea ideae* theory is really close to the theory of adequateness of knowledge, and the same possibility of a reflexive thought –and consciousness is a kind of this– turns out to be a consequence of this adequateness. On the whole, I can be *sure* of a false idea only because I have false ideas and I do not take into account the connection that may exist between them. If I consider this connection, then I can also deduce a contradiction from my false ideas, by means of which their falsity comes out. On the contrary, *veritas index sui,* or, making use of the language of the *Ethics*, *se ipsam cognoscit*.

From the opposite point of view, the mind cannot be *certain* of its *inadequate* ideas, considered in itself *as inadequate*. The TIE distinguishes between three kinds of inadequateness: *fiction, falsity,* and *doubt*. As will happen with the *imaginative* ideas presented in the *Ethics*, we can *presume* to be *certain* of those inadequate ideas only because they are related to some object envisaged as *possible* and nothing results in our mind against its possibility. In this case, therefore, we are certain not of the *object* itself that we envisage, but of the power that our mind has to represent that object as possible.

As Spinoza states in the *Ethics*:

> every idea which in us is absolute, that is, adequate and perfect, is true (E2P34). Falsity consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate ideas, that is, fragmentary and confused ideas, involve (E2P35). Knowledge of the first kind is the only cause of falsity; knowledge of the second and third kind is necessarily true (E2P41). Knowledge of the second and third kind, and not knowledge of the first kind, teaches us to distinguish true from false (E2P42). He who has a true idea knows at the same time that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt its truth (E2P43).

Evidently, there is something *adequate* in this power of *imagining* that results from the essence of the mind itself –given that this essence

is *to conceive of* some object, and our certainty derives only from this. In this sense, we can argue that, according to Spinoza, there are no *unconscious ideas*, although in our *inadequate* ideas there remains something that is not *conscious*. This *unconscious* element that appears in our *inadequate* ideas is nothing but the true and real nature of the object of such ideas, that is, the object that cannot be conceived of adequately through this ideas. The logical subordination of ideas to their reflexive certainty is evident: having an *idea reflexiva* of something is a consequence of having an adequate idea of something. Adequate ideas necessarily imply certainty and thus consciousness.

On the contrary, *inadequate* ideas can appear as *conscious* insofar as the mind should have an adequate idea of its own power to *represent* objects –given that the mind should be considered as the *adequate cause* of this power (E3Def1-2). However, when the mind conjures up its *inadequate ideas*, it has no adequate ideas of the things itself that are considered, and, in this sense, the mind is not *conscious* of the real objects of its ideas. Envisaging the real world inadequately, then, cuts off the mind from the reality and places it in the illusionary world of imagination, in which the mind is conscious of its power to imagine different things, but not of the things themselves. On this basis, it necessarily follows that something like consciousness cannot be essentially linked to the very nature of the idea *qua* idea. More properly, consciousness has to be considered as the consequence of –and depending on– the *adequateness* of the idea itself.

According to this point of view, the epistemological framework created by Spinoza is diametrically opposite to that of the Cartesian one[15]. From Descartes' point of view, consciousness is an essential property of thought –and allegedly its essence *tout court*– whereas Spinoza claims that consciousness and certainty are nothing but a

[15] On the relation between Spinoza's account of consciousness and other accounts provided during the XVII–XVIII centuries, cf. Balibar (2000). Levi (2000) takes issue with the non-subjectivist account of consciousness given by Balibar, providing a subjectivist account, which presents Spinoza's consciousness as «la capacité propre à l'esprit humain de se référer correctement ò lui-même comme sujet de ses idées» (p. 10). Malinowski-Charles (2004) has correctly challenged this Kantian interpretation. Indeed, Levi assumes a distinction between the adequate idea of myself that occurs in my mind and the same adequate idea that exists in God. But this assumption is inconsistent with the foundation of Spinoza's epistemology as a whole.

necessary *consequence* of an *adequate* thought of something. For this reason, consciousness is by no means *coextensive* with thought, as far as the human mind is concerned[16]. In fact, since the human mind can have many ideas, a large number of these are inadequate, thus, it can be conscious solely in relation to a limited range of (adequate) ideas.

In other words: according to Descartes, consciousness, like will and intellect, is a generic entity, i.e., something like –although maybe not exactly the same as– a *faculty* of the human mind. According to Spinoza, there is rather no generic consciousness at all, no more than generic will or intellect: in the human mind, there are nothing but particular ideas, some of them, when adequate, result also to be *conscious*. In the end, the consciousness of the mind is nothing but the collection of these particular consciousnesses –i.e., adequate– ideas.

However, the most significant theoretical result achieved by Spinoza in the *Ethics* –which underlines one of the paramount oppositions to Descartes– is the connection between this epistemological framework and the concrete nature of the mind's *ideatum*: the body and its complexity.

3. The body as obstacle and instrument of consciousness

In order to understand Spinoza's account of the human body, we should address the physical–physiological sketch of the *individuum* drawn in E2P13S. Spinoza seems to have in mind a biological model when he describes the *individuum* as a body composed by a large number of other different types of *individua* that are well integrated to the whole. Therefore, the *individuum* can be viewed as a *form* of integration between different bodies. This integration among its parts provides the individual a certain capacity for self-preservation. In this sense, the *individuum* is able to interact with the environment by partly changing its components, but conserving the same structure[17].

[16] From God's point of view, indeed, all the ideas are necessarily adequate, and, thus, God turns out to be conscious at the highest level.

[17] As regards this point, I will take for granted the analysis made by Matheron (1969), pp. 37-61. It does not mean that I agree completely with Matheron, but that, for the purposes of this paper, his account turns out to be good enough. For an overall understanding of Spinoza's account of individuality, cf. also Garber (1994) and Garrett (1994).

For the purposes of this paper, I would like to underline the overly dynamic nature of this account. It is noteworthy that being an *individuum* means, from Spinoza's point of view, not being a monolithic entity, closed in itself, without being related with anything else, but, on the contrary, it entails being a form of ontological organization which can exist and preserve its existence only thanks to the interaction with the external world. The balance between the inside and the outside is the real essence –the *conatus*– of each individuality.

According to Spinoza, the individual can do several actions owing to his physical *structure* or *form*. However, this *form* is nothing but a set of physical laws that regulates and coordinates the interactions among the individual's parts[18]. Spinoza does not use the terms «complexity», but I suggest we are allowed to call the relationship between the inner structure of a certain individual and the actions that this structure allows it to produce a «complexity»: the more this structure makes possible different actions, the more we can consider it as «complex».

From an epistemological point of view, since the human body is this complexity, which implies such relationships with other bodies, the human mind must be an idea, which is as complex as the human body. Particularly, the human mind must entail not only a relationship with the human body, but also a relationship with the other external bodies that the human body needs in order to exist and persist in its existence. Those external bodies are the causes of the *affections* of the human body. On this basis, Spinoza is able to demonstrate that the mind knows the human body *only* by means of its *affections* (E2P19).

Back to our point, we have to focus on the following essential distinction:

> so long as the human Mind perceives things from the common order of nature, it does not have an adequate, but only a confused and mutilated knowledge of itself, of its own Body, and of external bodies. For the Mind does not know itself except insofar as it perceives ideas of the affections of the body (by P23). But it does not perceive its own Body (by P19) except through the very ideas themselves of the affections [of the body], and it is also through them alone that it perceives external bodies (by P26). And so, insofar as it has these [ideas], then neither of itself (by P29), nor of

[18] Cf. also Ep32.

> its own Body (by P27), nor of external bodies (by P25) does it have an adequate knowledge, but only (by P18 and P28S) a mutilated and confused knowledge, q. e. d. (E2P29C)

Having an inadequate and confusing knowledge of itself means that the human mind is not conceived by God in this way. So, the real and adequate idea of my body and the idea of this idea, as it appears in God's thought, are different from what I see following the *communis ordo naturae*. Subsequently, insofar as (*quatenus*) my mind follows only the *communis ordo naturae,* it is *not conscious of itself*.

The *common order of nature* is the order of *imagination,* that is, the series of encounters between my body and the other bodies. Following the order of *imagination*, I cannot derive any adequate knowledge of those bodies and, therefore, of myself[19]. It must be underlined that imaginative ideas are not inadequate *qua* ideas: every idea by the fundamental fact of being something is positive (E2P33-35), and then, adequate (E2P17S). However, the *use* of imaginative ideas by the mind produces inadequate knowledge (E2P35 with S): when the mind follows the *common order of nature,* it makes use of imaginative ideas in a wrong way. The reason is quite evident: in order to have adequate knowledge of our affections, we need adequate knowledge of our body and of the other bodies. But our body at least is too complex and the human mind is not immediately able to reach an adequate knowledge of its body as a whole. Indeed, the ideas that result only from our immediate sensible impressions are not sufficiently informative about our nature and the nature of other bodies, thus they cannot produce adequate knowledge. From this point of view, insofar as the human mind limits itself to an *experentia vaga*, the human mind cannot reach a real *consciousness* of what really happens to its body.

[19] On Spinoza's account of imagination, cf. Garrett (2008). Garrett develops his interpretation arguing that Spinoza identifies «degrees of consciousness with degrees of power of thinking» (2008, p. 23), but I am attempting to demonstrate that one must conceive the «power of thinking» in terms of adequate knowledge. Having a certain power of thinking means that a certain mind can have a certain number of adequate ideas. Indeed, only if a mind is able to have adequate ideas it can be considered, from Spinoza's standpoint, powerful to a certain degree. Cf. also E5P25 where Spinoza explicitly identifies the *summus mentis conatus* with its effort to *res intelligere tertio cognitionis genere*.

Nevertheless, bodily complexity is also the key to explore the human possibility of fulfilling an alternative epistemological destiny. After presenting the hopeless condition of the human mind until E2P36, Spinoza starts from P37 to present his theory of *notiones communes* that is aimed to demonstrate the adequateness of the knowledge of the second kind.

The possibility of common notions hinges upon the same physico-physiological *excursus* of E2P13S and, in particular, upon the fact that all bodies have something in common. On this basis, Spinoza can argue that «if something is common to, and peculiar to, the human Body and certain external bodies by which the human Body is usually affected, and is equally in the part and in the whole of each of them, its idea will also be adequate in the Mind» (E2P39, see also its corollarium).

It must be noted that we can distinguish different kinds of *wholes*, and thus, we can have different orders of *common notions* that are common to different degrees[20]. For example, the laws of motion are common to all bodies, for the key fact that they are specific modifications of the same attribute of extension. But a human body is not necessarily identical with a stone, although both are bodies. Hence, there might exist some common notions that are common only among humans and not among stones –as *political* notions[21]. However, for the purpose of this paper, I focus on the fact that the capacity to know common notions could be explained as having degrees [22].

A very simple body can have only few aspects in common with another body, and if they are *corpora simplicissima,* they can only share their kinematic determinations[23]. Moreover, as far as a more complex body is concerned, it may be made up of different parts, and each of them may have something different in common with other bodies. This means that there is a connection between the increase in complexity and the increase in the number of the constitutive parts of a body.

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[20] Cf. Ep32; Gueroult (1974), pp. 324-390; Sacksteder (1978), (1985) and (1991); Matheron (1991).

[21] The same definition of *individuum* given in E2P13S presupposes that there exists a notion, common to all the *individua* x, that make up a certain *individuum* y, but this notion is not necessary shared by an *individuum* z that is different from y.

[22] This point is remarkably highlighted by Matheron (1969) pp. 71-74.

[23] Cf. E2P13SL2.

Consequently, the possibility that this body shares something with the external bodies rises sharply. A very complex body, as the human body is supposed to be, can have a large number of aspects and properties in common with other external bodies. Thus, the human mind can envisage a large number of common notions and, by means of these, it can adequately know the external things, its body and itself –i.e., it can be conscious of itself. Spinoza calls *reason* this kind of knowledge that focuses on the *common notions* among bodies (E2P40S2). The *rational knowledge* is necessarily *adequate* (E2P44) and it is above all by the use of it that the human mind can have an adequate knowledge of God's essence (E2P45-46).

I find the recent interpretation of Spinoza's account of consciousness offered by Steven Nadler very helpful in order to clarify what I have just presented. Nadler has argued against those interprets who hold that we cannot find in Spinoza's philosophy such an account. By making use of the current neurobiological debate over the «embodied-mind»[24], he has argued that the real consciousness basis in Spinoza's thought, is the same complexity of human body[25].

Starting from the theory of parallelism, Nadler has pointed out that the consciousness of the human mind *is* the complexity of the human body expressed under the attribute of thought[26]. Consequently, the

[24] Mills (2001) has argued that the non-dualistic epistemology developed by Spinoza creates a theoretical framework useful to prevent both eliminativism and reductionism. However, Mills does not explore Spinoza's account of «consciousness», and seems to disregard the importance of the link between consciousness and body. For an overview about Spinoza and neuro-biological studies, cf. Pauen (1998) and Ravven (1998).

[25] This view has been held for the first time by Matheron (1969) cf. p. 65-78.

[26] Wilson (1999a) is not concerned with the analysis of Spinoza's explanation of bodily nature. However, her choice and the following conclusion she draws from it seems questionable (p. 136): «it is hard to see how the linking of consciousness with intellect or distinct ideas in these two passages (E5P39, E2P13S) can be reconciled with E3P9 and its proof» (see also Wilson 1999b, p. 183). I will propose a feasible solution to this problem in §4 while discussing the relationship between consciousness and desire, that is the object of E3P9 quoted by Wilson. However, I completely agree with Wilson, when she claims that it is the «peculiar theocentric parameters» (1999a, p. 133) that support Spinoza's theory of consciousness. Moreover, I endorse Wilson's view that Spinoza's account does not draw a real and ontological distinction between the human and the animal minds: whatever

degree of human consciousness is correlated with the degree of bodily complexity[27].

Nevertheless, from Nadler's standpoint, three questions remain in the dark:

> [1] How the account of consciousness that I am attributing to Spinoza relates to the 'idea of ideas' doctrine? [...]
>
> [2] Suppose we know what bodily complexity is [...] what exactly *is* that mental complexity that is its correlate? Can we say anything more about it than that it *is* consciousness? [...]
>
> [3] How can degrees of consciousness have any relationship to the degree of clarity and distinctness or adequacy among our ideas?[28]

However, on the basis of the present discussion, the answer to the first question could be provided by Spinoza's definition of an *idea of idea*: «there is also in God an idea, *or* knowledge, of the human Mind, which follows in God in the same way and is related to God in the same way as the idea, *or* knowledge, of the human Body» (E2P20).

I had focused on the expression «in God», that encompasses the adequateness of any *idea ideae*. The idea of the mind that is in God must be an *adequate* idea of the mind. For this reason, it can occur *only* in God. On the contrary, it is inconceivable that any inadequate idea occurs *in God*, and thus it is unthinkable that an inadequate idea of the mind exists *in God,* i.e., from God's standpoint. From the connection between the *idea ideae* theory and the analysis of con-

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exists has a mind and a somewhat adequate knowledge, even if to a lesser degree. For this reason, I do not agree with Curley (1969) and (1988) on ascribing consciousness only to the human mind.

[27] Nadler argues against Garret (2008) by showing that consciousness is a function of the «mind's internal complexity» (Nadler 2008, p. 592) and not a «function of mind's power of thinking» (*ibidem*). In fact, the power of thinking is a consequence of the power of the body, which results from his complexity (cf. Nadler 2008, pp. 591-595). However, from what has been discussed, it results that the two perspectives are complementary: the power of *thinking*, the power of *acting*, the power of *knowing*, and the power of *being conscious*, share all the same ground, i.e., the parallelism between bodily complexity and bodily ability to act, and the mind's power to think adequately. As regards this point, the most extended attempt to identify consciousness and power has been made by Malinowski-Charles (2004).

[28] Nadler (2008), p. 595-596.

sciousness, it follows that we cannot have any sort of consciousness without having adequate knowledge.

Moreover, the adequate knowledge itself is the real link between this theory and the interpretation of consciousness in terms of complexity. Since a complex body shares many properties with other bodies that interact with it, the mind of this body is bound to elaborate many common notions by means of which, it is able to gain an adequate knowledge of both the external bodies and its *ideatum*. Therefore, this mind can have an adequate knowledge of itself, i.e., be conscious of *se ipsam*, other things, and God –since God itself is the real foundation of all bodies and reality, as I have briefly shown.

The result achieved, turns out to be a possible answer to the second question raised by Nadler. Indeed, the complexity of the mind is not merely the logical complexity of the set of ideas that constitutes the mind itself, but rather the ability of the mind to gain an adequate knowledge by means of common notions. Indeed, the more *complex* the *ideatum* of the human mind is, i.e., the human body, the more the human body must share different aspects with the external bodies by which it has been affected. Therefore, the human mind will be able to detect a greater set of common notions, owing to which it will reach an increasingly adequate notion of its own body and the external ones.

A body *ad plurimum aptum* is a body, which is able to share lots of properties with others, and, thus, to achieve a real *scientia* of the world and its ontological foundation –i.e., *God*. Since the mind can organize its experience by following not the *common order of nature*, but the *order of intellect*, it is conscious by knowing the world through the second or the third kind of knowledge. This outcome also answers the third question raised by Nadler.

Should we like to draw a picture of a conscious mind as it appears in God's thought, we might proceed as follows. There exists in God the idea of an *individuum* that is built up by a great variety of different bodies. For this reason, this *individuum* shares many properties with other external bodies and its mind can form many common notions. When an external body interacts with this *individuum*, it is then highly probable that its mind has some common notions that make it able to understand adequately the external body and the affection that the external body produces on the *individuum*. Therefore, the adequate idea of the idea of this *individuum* –i.e., the idea

of its mind– which results from the adequate idea of this affection, also pertains to the idea of this *individuum* –i.e., to its mind. As a consequence, this *individuum* has a certain consciousness of itself, or, more properly, it has certain conscious ideas of its own affections.

Moreover, if the mind of this *individuum* presents a great number of common notions, it is also able to better understand its affections: the more complex a body is, the more common notions will be found in its idea –i.e., its mind. The bigger the number of common notions to be found in its idea, the greater the adequacy with which it can know external things –i.e., the greater its consciousness. For this reason, the complexity of a conscious mind is nothing but the presence in it of a certain number of common notions that make it able to understand adequately what happens to its body.

Consciousness itself is a *form* of knowledge. However, according to Spinoza, this specific form is linked to the complexity of its *ideatum* (the human body) and the possibility, opened by the complexity itself, of knowing adequately the reality. Therefore, consciousness is not only an adequate knowledge, but also *that specific adequate knowledge which really expresses, under the attribute of thought, the bodily complexity.*

To summarize, Spinoza points at two main ways of organizing the human experience –the *common order of nature* and the *order of intellect*. Moreover, having a complex body is a necessary but *not sufficient* condition for being really conscious. If and only if the *individuum* is able to *resist* the power of imagination, or, in more technical terms, to avoid the abuse of imagination from which its mind could suffer[29], it can also become increasingly conscious *se ipsum*. The *conatus of the mind* tends to move in this direction, but achieving the goal depends on the particular and unique condition of each *individuum* and its capacity to achieve adequate knowledge.

4. Objections and answers

An objection could arise at this point. Let us consider the *Appendix* of the third part of the *Ethics*. At the very beginning, we find the definition of *cupiditas* (*Desire*):

> Desire is man's very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined, from any given affection of it, to do something.

[29] See on this abuse E1Ap.

> (*Cupiditas est ipsa hominis essentia, quatenus ex data quacunque ejus affection determinate concipitur ad aliquid agendum*).

Spinoza justifies this definition by arguing as follows:

> we said above, in P9S, that Desire is appetite together with the consciousness of it. And appetite is the very essence of man, insofar as it is determined to do what promotes his preservation. […] I could have said that Desire is man's very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined to do something. But from this definition (by IIP23) it would not follow that the Mind could be conscious of its Desire, *or* appetite. Therefore, in order to involve the cause of this consciousness, it was necessary (by the same proposition) to add: *insofar as it is conceived, from some given affection of it, to be determined* etc. (AD1 explicatio).

Spinoza tells us that he has introduced in his definition a reference to affections because without it, we cannot understand desire as «appetite together with the consciousness of it». Indeed, P23 demonstrates –as we have shown– that consciousness follows from the ideas of affections.

However, if our interpretation is correct, we must admit that consciousness follows only from the *adequate* ideas of affections. Then, when Spinoza introduces his definition of desire, he must presuppose that only through an *adequate idea* of an affection, the mind can be conscious of itself, and then can have desire instead of appetite.

But here starts the objection. In fact, we read in the *affectum generalis definitio:*

> an Affect that is called a Passion of the Mind is a confused idea, by which the Mind affirms of its Body, or of some part of it, a greater or lesser force of existing than before, which, when it is given, determines the Mind to think of this rather than that.
> (*Affectum, qui animi pathema dicitur, est confuse idea, qua Mens majorem, vel minorem cui Corporis, vel alicujus ejus partis existendi vim, quam antea, affirmat, et qua data ipsa Mens ad hoc potius, quam ad illud cogitandum determinatur*).

Spinoza writes explicitly «*affectum, qui animi pathema dicitur*», then, he assumes affects as *inadequate ideas*. As he writes below in the explication, «dico primo affectum, seu passionem animi esse *confusam ideam*» (I say, first, that an Affect, *or* passion of the Mind, is a *confused idea*), with reference to E3P3. But if he assumes affects as *inadequate ideas*, and he assumes also that the

ideas of the affects are the source of consciousness in desires, then, he is assuming that this consciousness does not imply any adequate idea of the affects. And this seems to be contrary to what I have tried to demonstrate.

However, I can show how this objection reveals a kind of *paralogism*. Indeed, in the two passages quoted, Spinoza refers to affects in two different senses. When he deals with affects in the definition of desire, these affects are linked with the capacity for the human essence to *act,* and when Spinoza employs this verb, we are forced to assume its meaning in the technical sense he gives in E3D2:

> I say that we can act when something happens, in us or outside us, of which we are the adequate cause (E2D2).
> (*Nos tum agree dico, cum aliquid in nobis, auto extra nos fit, cujus adeaquata sumus causa*).

Then, he explicitly identifies actions with the possession of adequate ideas in the first proposition:

> our Mind does certain things [acts] and undergoes other things, viz. insofar as it has adequate ideas, it necessarily does certain things, and insofar as it has inadequate ideas, it necessarily undergoes other things (E3P1).
> (*Mens nostra quaedam agit, quadam vero patitur, nempe quatenus adeaquatas habet ideas, eatenus quaedam necessario agit, et quatenus ideas habet inadaequatas, eatenus necessario quaedam patitur*).

This idea is even clearer in the third proposition:

> the actions of the Mind arise from adequate ideas alone; the passions depend on inadequate ideas alone (E3P3).
> (*Mentis actions ex solis ideis adaequatis oriuntur; passione autem a solis inadaequatis pendent*).

The essence of desire (*cupiditas*) is not to be conscious but to be able to determine the human mind to do this or that. Consciousness follows from our desire to the extent that the actions that this desire produces should always imply a certain degree of adequate knowledge. But desire, such as all the affects, might be both an *active* affection or a *passion*. When Spinoza refers to *affects that are passions* – among those, he comprehends also desire[30]– he is not concerned with

[30] Cf. the explication of the general definition of affects: «addidi denique, *et qua data ipsa mens ad hoc potius, quam ad aliud cogitandum determinatur,*

underlying the difference between appetite and desire by referring to consciousness. On the contrary, his attempt consists in subsuming all the three fundamental kinds of passions, *joy, sorrow* and *desire,* under the same definition.

The key remark to keep in mind is this: if we maintain that consciousness arises from adequate knowledge, we have to consider any affect that is conscious to the extent that it is supported by adequate ideas. Since every idea is always adequate to some extent –for the main fact of being an idea– thus, every affect should be also conscious to some extent. This does not imply that we are conscious of *all* our affects in the same way: our ideas differ from one another by reason of their adequateness and thus, we are conscious of these ideas in different ways.

Moreover, it should be admitted that there is a sense in which also a *passion* must imply a certain level of adequate knowledge, and therefore a certain level of consciousness. Undoubtedly, the human mind is not always the adequate cause of the *variation* of its *conatus*, which chiefly depends on the external causes. But this implies only that the human mind is often *unconscious* of the causes that determine its actual state, although it is well conscious of this state itself –which the human mind can consider adequately.

In this sense, Spinoza demonstrates that: «the Mind, both insofar as it has clear and distinct ideas and insofar as it has confused ideas, endeavors to persist in its own being over an indefinite period of time, and is conscious of this conatus» (E3P9). Indeed, the *causes* that modify my conatus can be known adequately or inadequately, that is, can be passions or actions. However, I cannot envisage *inadequately* my present *endeavor* to persist in my existence, because this endeavor is my actual essence (E3P6). Therefore, I must be conscious at least of this actual endeavor.

Therefore, we have to deny in the same way, that there might exist an idea that is *absolutely inadequate* –i.e. totally false or negative– and, for the same reason, we have also to deny that there might exist an affect that is *absolutely passive*. As far as we are concerned with this affect, we are always determined to act and –although we

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ut praeter Laetitae et Tristitiae naturam, quam prima definitionis pars explicat, Cupiditatis etiam naturam exprimerem» (Finally, I added *which determines the Mind to think of this rather than that* in order to express also, in addition to the nature of Joy and Sadness (which the first part of the definition explains), the nature of Desire).

do not know the real causes that determine us– we know that we are producing some actions that we must know adequately.

The same idea can be better understood through a reasoning *ad absurdum*: if there could be some idea absolutely false or some affect absolutely passive, we had no reason to say that we are conscious of it: an absolutely false idea is an idea of *nothing*, and there is nothing to be conscious of in it. An absolutely passive affection is an affection in which we do not play any causal role, and thus we have nothing to be conscious of concerning it. Therefore, we have to pay attention to the context in which Spinoza deals with desire and the consciousness related to it –i.e., when he is concerned to define desire in itself. This context is quite different from when Spinoza deals with desire only in order to subsume it among the most fundamental kind of passions. Each affect might be regarded both as an active and as a passive affect. Thus, the fact of being considered as passive from a certain point of view does not prevent the affect to be considered also active from a different point of view. In the definition of desire as a *passive* affect, there is no longer a question about the consciousness of desire: all passive affections contain a minimal degree of adequateness. From this point of view, desire can be defined as the conscious result of our appetite. However, this definition does not prevent us from considering desire also as a *passive* affection, if we reconnect it with its external causes, which we do not know adequately[31].

[31] Balibar's account of consciousness (1994) could be challenged in view of what I have explained so far. According to Balibar, in Spinoza's works two kind of consciousness occur: the first is linked to inadequate knowledge and all objects of moral life, such as wills, desires and so forth; the second is connected to the *scientia intuitive*. Moreover, Balibar underlines the impossibility of shifting from the former to the latter and he claims that this is possible only by means of a *jump*. However, Balibar bases his argument on the occurrences of the word *conscious* and its derivatives and he points out, not mistakenly, that they are not theoretically linked to the theory of *idea ideae*. As far as I am concerned, from this evidence does not necessary follow that consciousness could be conveyed as something independent from this theory nor that it does not have an adequate knowledge of itself. It is noteworthy that from Balibar's standpoint, the bodily complexity does not play any pivotal role. However, Spinoza himself makes clear in E5P22-25 that our ability to conceive of adequately depends on the presence in our mind of an adequate idea of the essence of our body, i.e., from the *eternal part* of our mind. On this point, cf. Mignini (1990) and (1994), and Scribano (2006), (2008) and (2012).

We can better explain this point by taking an example. From the fact that, in my daily life I am conscious of many things, it does not necessarily follow that I know something adequately[32]. For example, at this moment in time, I would like to finish this paper, and I am conscious that I would like to finish it, but this fact does not mean that I also know adequately about what I am supposed to write. To put this in a more formal language, I can be conscious of p also when I do not know adequately p. Thus, I can want or desire p, also without knowing it.

Now, if consciousness is an adequate knowledge, in cases akin to the example given above, we could raise the question of what kind of things can I have knowledge of. If I want p, I would be supposed to know p to a certain extent, at least by means of imagination. This knowledge is undoubtedly confusing. But the affection caused by p is very clear, since my want of p results from this affection. If p were completely indifferent to me –i.e., if p did not affect me–, I would not want p[33]. Thus, as we have shown, affections do not imply an adequate knowledge of either my body or any external body, but they imply a modification of my *conatus*, that is, an interaction with the body's power of persevering in its existence. In that manner, my want of p results from the fact that p affects me to such an extent that modifies my *conatus* by increasing its power. I may know nothing of the real essence of p, or of the reasons why p occurs to me, but I surely know that p –as I imagine it– has a positive effect on me, because my *want of p* is *identical* to the knowledge of this increase[34].

It is noteworthy that we have used the word «knowledge» even though p cannot lead to a *real* increase in my *conatus*. In fact, when I know that p is supposed to increase my *conatus*, I *imagine* this increase without having any reason to think the contrary. But, my imagination, in this case and *in se considerata*, is an adequate knowledge[35]. When I achieve p and I verify that p *decreases* my *conatus,* I

[32] Spinoza overcomes the problem of free will: I can be aware of my desires but not of the causes of them. Cf. for example E1Ap; E2P35S; Ep58.

[33] Cf. for example E4P29.

[34] Since, according to Spinoza, *to want that p* is identical to *having the idea that p* (E2P48-49), the power of my will is identical to the power of my idea that p. With regard to this interesting topic, cf. Della Rocca (2003); also Steinberg (2005) focuses on this, cf. particularly the distinction between affirmation and belief drawn by her.

[35] Cf. E2P17S.

verify not the falsity of my previous imagination as a whole, but the falsity that the real-p is identical to the p I have imagined before –so that I am disappointed by the real-p[36].

As a result, when I want p, even if I solely imagine p without knowing it adequately, my mind is affected by p to such an extent that implies that the *knowledge* that p leads necessary to an increase in my *conatus*. When I want p, even if I do not know p adequately, I have a certain adequate knowledge that a certain p is bound to exist: as long as it affects me, there is an increase in my *conatus*. The reality might be obviously different from my imagination, but the *disappointment* from which I am bound to suffer does not necessarily falsify the knowledge of what, in general and according to my real nature, can increase my power.

In more Spinozean terms: every imaginative idea, *qua* idea, is something positive, and accordingly, adequate (E2P17S). But the *use* the mind has for imaginative ideas following the *common order of nature,* produces *inadequate* knowledge. Therefore, this use does not produce the adequate *idea ideae* that the consciousness is. As a consequence, the mind cannot reach its consciousness in this way. However, insofar as we are able to *act* and our body is able to interact with other external bodies thereby increasing its power –i.e., insofar as we are *adequate causes*– our mind also must conjure up several adequate ideas of its bodily affections, and, through them, an adequate idea of itself –i.e., our mind must became conscious of itself.

In Spinoza's view, *activity* and *passivity* coexist within the human being and thus in the human mind. Therefore, consciousness cannot be a monolithic status: we are never totally conscious of anything that happens as well as we are never totally unconscious of ourselves. On the contrary, consciousness depends on the adequateness of each idea that the human mind has. I can be increasingly gaining an adequate knowledge of the world, my body and, thus, myself, and so, can become increasingly conscious of whatever occurs to me. This, in turn, means that I have become increasingly *active* in relation with those effects that I can adequately know through my nature –i.e., the nature of my body. At least, I can be or become conscious of my *passions*, and by raising my consciousness, I take the first step of my *emendation.*

[36] Cf. for example E3P18S2; E3P36C.

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